

Chapter 6: Organization of Things, Time, and Due Dates

Teacher Organization

One of the most important aspects of keeping the classroom running smoothly is to ensure that the teacher is organized. If there is constant downtime from the teacher needing to shuffle through papers, make copies, or hand out materials, then the students are more likely to get distracted and start chatting or escalating behaviors into areas that make it more difficult to get them ready to work again. In order to prevent this from happening, it's crucial that the teacher has a personal organizational system that allows him or her to quickly find any and all materials needed, as well as to access daily plans.

Class Materials

Keeping the various class materials organized is step number one to having a smoothly running classroom. After all, if the teacher can't keep track of things, then the students will suffer for having excessive downtime while the teacher attempts to find or distribute materials that should have been prepared before class.



Keeping materials separated by class period, level, or content area is one way to begin. Retaining those habits from school days, binders can work wonders for keeping resources organized. They allow for customization such as tabs to mark different sections, and easily changeable order. If new resources are found, then it is a breeze to throw them into a plastic protector and keep the master copies of papers clean and crisp for future copies.

Having those clean copies of handouts can save face as well, such as when an activity takes far less time than planned. Instead of pointlessly stalling (and all of the students knowing it), the binder has a trusty activity from last year that hasn't been done yet this year, but relates quite well that the students can move on to - all as if it had been planned. Smooth move! Furthermore, having a system of binders [like this one](#) can help substitute teachers as well in times when they need to fill in.

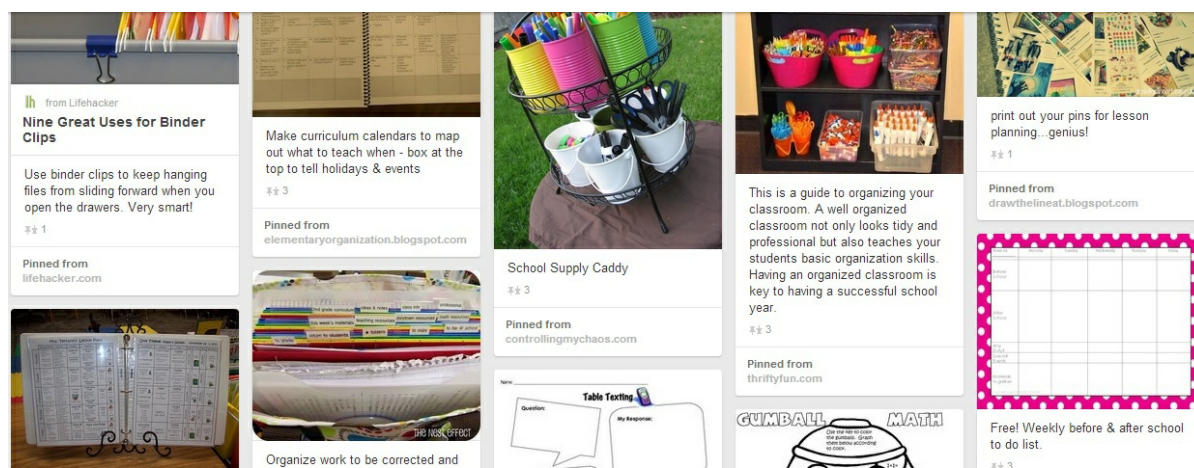
One teacher at Sanborn Regional High School in New Hampshire, Dee Dunbar-Hambucken, says that for her it works to “keep levels separate, and organize lesson plans by color” (D. Dunbar-Hambucken, personal communication, March 23, 2014). Color coding is a tried-and-true method, and it works for those who have a strong

preference for visual techniques. By keeping each class a separate color, it becomes quite easy to identify which binder is needed for which class or day. This can help prevent that gut-wrenching moment when a glance into the trusty teacher's bag reveals that, "Oh no, I brought the binder for a *GOLD* day and today is a *BLUE* day!" moment. If only they had been color-coded, it would have been a simple matter to grab the gold colored binder instead of hoping that the flat black cover of this one would reveal the plans for the correct day.

Handouts

Imagine this scene: A teacher, just a few years away from retirement. His home office is overflowing with binders, which are overflowing with papers themselves. So much so, in fact, that they simply cannot contain the mass of handouts and substitute plans that he has gathered throughout his career. In a hurry one morning, he rushes to his home office to find that particular stack of papers that he remembers using three years ago in a unit like this one. He recalls having placed them about halfway down a stack by his computer, but as he works to slide out the few pages that he needs, the stack wobbles, topples, his eyes flash, the papers crash - well, as much as paper *can* crash - and his students have a substitute that day for class.

In order to prevent that from happening to any non-imaginary teachers, it is crucial to consider how he got to that point. Over the years, as knowledge of what works and what doesn't grows, so too do the handouts that a teacher has at his or her fingertips. The wealth of knowledge makes it hard to throw any away, because surely, that one paper used to such great success will be relevant again soon, no really, it will. However, while waiting for that satisfying moment to return, teachers need to develop a better method for keeping their many handouts organized.



Pinterest board with ideas for teacher organization.

Luckily, it's much easier in this technological age to avoid having the many stacks of

papers, the storage buckets of binders past, and the endless paper cuts. One of the easiest quick-tips is to simply scan any papers that are used consistently in lessons into a personal laptop or computer and back them up to a system of folders on an external hard drive or cloud-based drive. These folders can be organized in much the same way as the color-coded binders. However, now with the added functionality of sorting by date or modification date on a computer, keeping track of various materials becomes even easier. Some suggested methods for ordering:

- Alphabetical by topic, standard, etc. This will help when working with a particular standard by knowing where materials that address it are.
- Year used (2013-14, 1981-82). This will help decide what things are still current and applicable and what things might be able to be disposed of.
- Class used (18th Century English, English as a Foreign Language). This will help when re-teaching a course or a similar course to get ideas on what worked the previous time(s).
- level of class/students (8th grade, AP English, ELL/ESL)

here are so many other methods that could be used, but each teacher is different in terms of how he or she keeps materials organized and accessible, as proven by [this Pinterest board](#) with countless ideas on classroom and teacher organization. With digital materials, it becomes even easier to sort through, search through, and maintain. These can be accessed from anywhere if uploaded to a cloud-based storage (such as SkyDrive or Google Drive) so when the wrong binder is in the bag, materials can be quickly obtained between classes by downloading and printing it off right there.

Another point to remember is that sometimes, it really is time to let go. Materials that worked ten years ago might not be as relevant or useful now. Dee Dunbar-Hambucken mentions her experiences with this as well: “It’s kind of crazy, though, because what worked even two years ago with freshman doesn’t work anymore” (D. Dunbar-Hambucken, personal communication, March 23, 2014). Keep an eye on moving forward with what new resources you can find. One method to keeping track of internet resources is to use a social bookmarking site such as [Delicious](#) which allows users to tag and comment on their links, as well as see who else has linked that website and browse through their public links. This can help immensely in finding new resources to replace the outdated ones.

The teacher from the first paragraph was fine, by the way. After all, it *was* just paper, so while it was heavy, he was okay. Not even a paper cut on him. But, rest assured, he began using some of the techniques just covered in this section.

Agenda or Assignment Book

Using an agenda or assignment book to keep track of plans for each class is also a basic step to keeping organized. Agendas can help teachers keep track of what is happening on each day for each class. Keeping these simple plans straight and organized in a visual form can save the day when one encounters a brain-fart. Read the section on *Time Management* to learn more about how to use and maintain agendas.

Classroom Organization

Keeping the classroom organized can save time both for the teacher and the students. When students know where to get certain materials, it means that they don't have to ask the other students or the teacher and can advocate for their own ability. It also prevents them from getting the chance to use it as an excuse with the all too familiar "I don't have something I need for class...can I go get it from my locker?" To minimize repetition of instructions and wasted class time, setting up clearly organized areas in the classroom and getting students used to and familiar with them can provide extra minutes to be used well.

Creating Routines

Routines are a wonderful way to facilitate classroom management of common questions and activities such as bathroom breaks, absent students, and needed writing utensils. Set up these routines and procedures early in the year and get the students used to following them. Publically thank students for using them correctly until it becomes common procedure.

Creating a sign out sheet for the bathroom allows students to quietly excuse themselves from the classroom, meaning they don't have to interrupt the flow of the learning by announcing their bodily needs (which really, is more comfortable for everybody). By having them write down the time that they left and arrived, it also makes it easy to keep track of who is taking an unduly long time and might need to be spoken to about the importance of class time.

Have a small set of drawers or containers that have commonly used classroom supplies, such as extra pencils, colored pencils, scissors, and possibly most importantly, lined paper for those students who are chronically without a notebook. Label the drawers so that the students know where everything is, and make sure to clarify which drawers are and are not appropriate for students to take materials from. For example, it might help to have the class materials on the opposite side of the room from the teacher's desk, so that students are not tempted to snag anything from

there. Similarly, make sure to clearly establish whether students need to return items or not (such as extra pencils).

If there are any commonly used items in class, such as journals, having labeled baskets for each class in an easily accessible spot in the room can save on time since students will know exactly where they are and when they should have them. Keeping important and commonly used items in the room also ensures that students will not have the option of avoiding an activity because they do not have it.

Dr. Thomas Gordon, author of T.E.T.: Teacher Effectiveness Training, has many suggestions for what he refers to as simplifying the environment. One is having an in-out basket or tray for students' assignments, which helps cut down on those moments towards the end of class when students bombard the teacher with their papers, creating the possibility that it might be lost or forgotten (Gordon 166). The trays make it clear to students that they are responsible for getting their assignments into that tray to be counted. He also encourages the method of having filing systems for the students, and adds that check-out trays could help to ensure that materials are returned when need be (Gordon 166). Similar to the idea about the journals, he also suggests that teachers "put materials, books, tools, and equipment where students can reach them" (Gordon 165).

Extra Materials

For students who were absent or that ever-present student who loses the papers from one day to the next, it can be helpful to have designated spots for extra copies of papers that students need. Teachers could use a file system with a folder for each student so that if that student is absent, they can come in the next day and know exactly where they can find what they need. This can help stem the tide of that question that inevitable provokes either sarcasm or pain, depending on the day: "Did I miss anything?"

Schoolwork Organization

Students sometimes have trouble with organizing their schoolwork, and helping them learn how to organize it will carry them to the next step of being a good student. This section covers only a few of the vast array of ways to organize schoolwork, some of which can be carried over into other parts of life, such as using binders, filing cabinets, and color coding.

Folders/Binders

Students are always losing paperwork, always. One way to help prevent the loss of

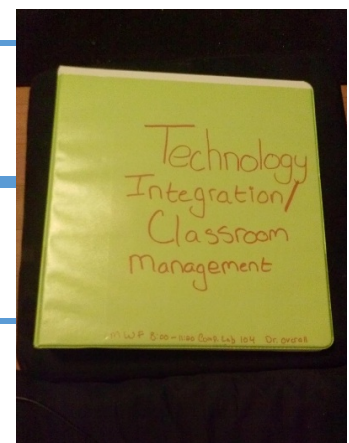
important papers is the use of binders and folders. The drawback to using binders and folders are the students who choose not to keep them organized and instead just stick papers in the pockets and rush off to their next class. The key is to give your students the tips that will follow in this section. A teacher at Bucksport High School, Bill Tracy, says, “Folders and binders are possibly the best answer for organization...[find] some way to manage passed back, passed in work for each and every class.”

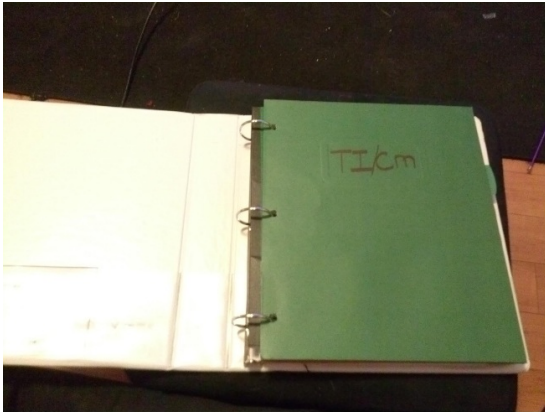
When using binders and folders in class, make sure the binder you use is appropriate for the amount of paperwork you will receive from the class. For example, do not go and get a 3-inch binder for a shop class, a 1-inch or a folder would work nicely. Using dividers in each binder is extremely helpful. Students should label each tab with a name that a) relates to your subject, and b) helps organize paperwork. Examples of tag labels are notes, handouts, homework, projects, formulas, and applications, but the list is really limitless. Students do not have to use store-bought dividers. Construction paper, manila folders, regular pocket folders and more will all work just as well. If a student chooses to, he or she does not have to label the dividers; color-coding may be just as helpful, which will be discussed in a later section.

Folders by themselves are still an option, if the class the student is taking will have little paperwork passed back or passed in, then there is no need to go out and buy a three-ring binder. Folders can be used with binders. Some students use them as dividers (an additional way to help organize papers within the binder). Some students use folders to transport their homework to and from school without having to bring binders home on top of textbooks and laptops. (Students have to make sure they have everything they need, such as notes, before leaving school if this an option that they choose.)

This is a binder for EDU 221. It is 2 ½ inches and color coded.

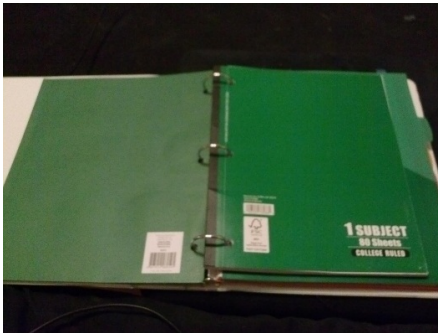
This is a binder for EDU 221. It is 2 ½ inches and color coded.





It also has a green folder on the inside for homework, color coded to match the color of the binder.

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There is also a green notebook to take notes in.

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And finally, there are divers needed for the class. In this case, they are Homework, Handouts, and Projects.

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Filing Cabinets

Filing cabinets or even milk crates can be used to help students organize their schoolwork at home and at school. The teacher can use filing cabinets (or milk crates as a cheaper version) as a way of organizing finished student work, absent student

work, handouts, etc. in the classroom. At home, parents or guardians can use filing systems to keep track of student projects. As well, students can keep one in their bedroom as another location to keep schoolwork, and keep track of important school work no longer needed at school.

Locker Organization

Teaching your students how to keep their lockers organized is another key element to schoolwork organization. If your student's locker is in a state of disarray, they will have a hard time trying to locate that formula sheet you gave them two weeks ago. Whether your students have lockers that are single and four feet tall, or the stacked lockers that are two feet tall, there are a few ways they can be organized.

One example of a way to keep lockers organized is by keeping binders, textbooks, other important documents, and school supplies at the bottom of the locker. Binders and textbooks should be next to each other standing up. School supplies can be arranged in an organized fashion in the remaining space in the bottom of the locker. Any jackets, backpacks, etc. can be hung from the hooks in the top of the locker. Purchasing locker shelves and installing them into the locker can give the student more room for binders and textbooks.

Notes

Students have a tendency to not want to take notes, and if they do, they are not always the best of notes. Often, they are just shoved into textbooks, binder pockets, or even carried loose from class to class and shoved into lockers, destined to be covered by other items and lost until the end of the semester. ("Note taking interventions have been evaluated..." (408 Langberg et. al) in small classrooms especially with ADHD students, they have gone over well, so there is hope for your students). There are several ways to help your students keep their notes organized, a few of which are mentioned in above sections, such as keeping notes in the "notes" section of a three ring binder, and using filing systems. Some students like to keep their notes in the notebook they write them in.

Students who rewrite notes have a few more options for keeping track of their notes. Keeping copies of the original notes is something that some students choose to do. If this is the case and the original copies are kept at school, the student may keep them in a binder. They might also rewrite them into a new notebook, whether it is a regular spiral-binding notebook or a composition notebook. They may write it onto loose leaf paper and put them into a binder. In rewriting notes, some students choose to color code to help with studying; this will be talked about in the next section. Some tips for

rewriting notes, according to Barstow High School in California, are to “write definitions and lists,” “use abbreviations and symbols whenever possible,” and “highlight important parts of notes.”

Color Coding

Color coding can be used in many parts of schoolwork organization, from notes to binder organization, to almost anything. In this section we will focus on color coding notes and binders. There are many ways to color code notes, the first of which is alternating colors for sections. An example of this is:

Section about the diameter of a circle:

Formula: $C=2r$

Section about the circumference of a circle

Formula: $C=2\pi r$

This way you know by looking at it that there are two different formulas here.

Another example of color coding would be to have the notes from class be one color and your analysis of the notes to be in another, here is an example:

Section about the diameter of a circle:

Formula: $C=2r$

This is how you work a diameter problem: if the radius of a circle is 6, then the diameter is 12 because $C=2(6)=12$.

Section about the circumference of a circle

Formula: $C=2\pi r$

This is how you work a circumference problem: if the radius of a circle is 6, then the circumference is 37.699 because $C=2\pi(6)=37.699$.

Color coding binders also has a few options, one of which is using a different color of binder, dividers, folders, and/or notebook for each class. This makes it easy to identify what is needed for each class at just a glance--which is often all a hurried student has. A second way of color coding binders is by color coding the tabs of dividers; make sure they are the same across all classes. An example of this would be a blue tab for notes, a red tab for handouts, a green tab for tests, and a yellow tab for applications.

Homework Management

Students do not always know how to manage their homework. This section will talk about the organization, tips, and how to break up homework assignments. Time management will be talked about in a later section.

Tips for parents

Parents are a key element in helping students with their homework management; if parents do not know how to help manage their child's homework, there is a possibility that the child may not know how to manage their own homework, or even other elements in their life. Bill Tracy from Bucksport High School, Maine, has a few tips for parents on helping their student succeed. "Establish a time that works best for your student/youth that can be a consistent routine. Teach them to prioritize their work and organize [it] into chunks that make sense, while being able to get it done on time. If students are getting work in on time, then the strategy is working, if not, the parents should implement a reward/consequence so that work is done when asked."

Order

When students go to do homework, it is best to have them organize their homework into chunks. One method could be to work from easiest to hardest, or the most work to the least (or vice versa), doing all the assignments from one class, then moving onto the next, or even alternating assignments from one class to another. The best way to break it down is to start with the homework that has the soonest due date. Bill Tracy, history teacher at Bucksport High School, says to "break down larger assignments and timelines for completion... [use] their in-school time as wisely as possible to get things done. That way there is less pressure when home to have to commit too much time to homework."

Put everything together

Students are always leaving homework at home, or do not know where it went because their homework was all over the place at home. When the student is done with their homework at home, the safest way to make sure that they do not leave anything at home when they go to school the next day or after the weekend is to put everything together in one place. Make sure that all notes, binders, textbooks, handouts, etc. are in the student's bag for school or all stacked in one place so that they are not scattered all over their home. This is also a safe way to make sure that animals, such as dogs and cats, do not eat their homework.

Write everything down

Students do not always just "remember" what homework they have for every class, and when each assignment is due. There are a few ways to help your student remember when assignments are due, one of which is a planner. Have students either purchase or create a planner so that students can write down when assignments are due and when they plan on doing the assignments. Another way to aide your students is to create a web page, such as a wikispace, to have all documents for that class available to students as well as an agenda, with due dates. There is also a plethora of

resources available to students on the internet to help them keep track of what is due when, such as Google Calendar, [MyStudyLife](#), or [Online Student Planner](#).

Student Organization

Extra Materials

Extra materials are one of the most essential items for any teacher. As we know, students habitually miss class and there is not much we can do about it. In fact, I have handed out papers to students one day and then the next day they have already lost it. This amazing occurrence happens every day in our classrooms around the nation, and it is not going to be changing anytime soon. Luckily, there is an answer.

We are reaching the pinnacle of our digital age in the classroom right now. It's time to realize this and begin adapting to it as teachers and having our students adapt as well. If we put our extra materials online (via wiki, blog, etc.), each time a student does not have the materials they need, we can refer them to the webpage. This not only saves time for the teacher, but ends up being much more resourceful for the students as well. By limiting on the size of their binder and having things somewhat pre-organized for them, this turns out to be the most efficient and time-effective way to handle materials in the classroom.

Make-up Work

Along with extra materials comes make-up work: another annoying necessity that all teachers have to deal with and most teachers do not enjoy dealing with it. There are two sides to this coin, the first being getting them the material and the second keeping track of who needs to make up work. There are solutions to these problems though, and some educators in field today have found some extraordinarily efficient ways.

The way many teachers in Maine deal with this is through a program called PowerSchool, a virtual gradebook that stores grades on the cloud. This keeps track of who has done what as well as reminding the students who have not done material that they need to get it done. It is fantastic in this way as it keeps both you and your students on top of your game.

For make-up work that requires extra materials simply follow what has been said above, but also keep track of who is missing what using PowerSchool to ensure maximum efficiency and speed.

English as a second language

One issue that is becoming much more prevalent in today's teaching society is having students who are not fluent in English in the classroom. I have seen classrooms that have twenty native English speakers and one student who is an exchange student that is struggling with learning English. It is important to recognize this and be able to adapt and make sure students are organized appropriately when it comes to their work and are not overwhelmed.

Nancy Lemberger, who wrote the book *Bilingual Education*, talks about what it is like having these students in the classroom. At one point she states that, "Tomorrow, when somebody else comes in, I'll have to start all over again. Since I am alone, that's why I present lessons in English and then give a summary in Russian." This is one of the many trials of teaching because we have reached a massive crossroads (Lemberger 37).

On one end we have to teach the lesson again which is a teacher's worst enemy, and on the other hand we strive for immersion for these ESL students, because we want them to get better. Some of us will want to organize them separately and prevent that, but we cannot. Having that immersion is all part of the learning process.

Learning Styles

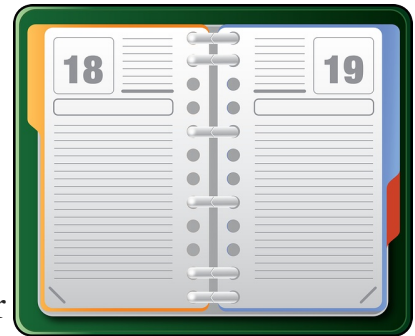
Many students have different learning styles, as we have discussed and talked about already in previous chapters. The best way to work with organizing students while utilizing their learning styles, is have it mean something to them.

For example if you have a class full of students and half of them are in the concert band, use that to your advantage! Perhaps clap a rhythm when you want to get their attention will work best, or suggest having them write a song for the class. Or if you have some students who absolutely love the outdoors, take them outside occasionally and relate your content material to what they love. This is the best way to use learning styles in the classroom, simply embrace each one and take advantage of what your students love. Sometimes simply showing them a picture of the outdoors can make all the difference.

Time Management

Agendas

Agendas are one of the most efficient and effective way to run a classroom. When having a class the last thing any teacher wants to do is make their students feel like their time is being wasted. When a teacher prepares an agenda beforehand, it makes the class run that much smoother and helps eliminate any and all wasted time. The best agendas are the ones that focus on the big picture and allow time for each point to be made, as well as allow the teacher some breathing room. This is important because as teachers, we all know that everything we want to do will always be longer than we plan.



A popular way to view an agenda is to imagine yourself in a giant, important, essential business meeting. The only thing is, you're the one in charge of taking notes on the meeting minutes and content. Let the huge meeting be your lesson plan and you are the one taking detailed notes and details over everything that they are saying (or that you are thinking). By the end of the meeting the lesson plan will be well thought-out and will have developed into something tremendous that can be used for years to come.

[Discovery Education](#) is a great resource to look for and discover other teachers' lesson plans and agendas. Although they may not all be fantastic, most of them capture the idea of having an agenda: something planned where there is never a minute wasted in the classroom, which is the goal. By browsing through these it is easy to see that there are many options for us as teachers and that within our agendas is a time for our creativity to shine.

This is not always the easiest solution, as we all know, and sometimes it can be easy to get caught up in everything else that is going on---including, but not limited to, the other ten classes that you are probably teaching.

Practice?

Some teachers, however, decide to simply make up the agenda as they teach the class. Maybe within their first few years of teaching they have the initiative and desire to impress and amaze their students with their agendas. Although it had become overwhelming too fast. Luckily, some teachers can pull this off, and others cannot.

To find out more information from inside the field I took the advantage of interviewing a high school art teacher, Melissa Burns, to see what she had to say about having an agenda. She says, "I do bullet-point everything I need to teach, every

outcome I need to make sure they accomplish (rubric... which I always let them know what they are going to be assessed on before starting the actual project), and often show art work that will inspire the project.” This helps make her lessons more efficient as well as save time for her. She has been teaching for 20 years, and as you can see her priority is making sure the students are learning and are inspired.

There are two schools of thought on just going for it without planning too much beforehand.

They focus on student involvement and time management. Both have their advantages and disadvantages to each other as well as to the agenda.

Teachers who prefer to just go out there and keep student involvement at an all-time high every class are usually very successful. When teachers are constantly asking students questions and making sure they understand the material, the students do not have a second to make it seem like their time is being wasted because they are constantly being questioned and engaged. Teachers who can do this are the naturals when it comes to teaching and understand their students as much as they understand themselves.

The other concept is time management, or watching the clock as many like to call it. This way of teaching shines in certain subject areas (i.e. mathematics, science) whereas in others it is diminished (i.e. English, history). The reason for this is that there is always another problem for students to do, or another engaging world concept for them to grasp when it comes to the subjects dealing with math. For the more liberal arts subject areas, sometimes it can be difficult to keep constantly bringing up important world issues since this will rapidly decrease your students motivation.

When we ask teachers which one of these ways they prefer, most will say neither and move on. Although when we observe these same teachers classrooms, sometimes these teachers are guilty of it. It is important to watch and be able to distinguish what the best way to run our classroom is. Fortunately for most teachers, there is a way to combat the procrastination of planning and be prepared for our students. They give us summers for a reason.

Summer Planning

Remember: utilize the three months given to us each year and prepare for your classroom. This is the perfect time to sit down and come up with a game plan for the year and make sure that you and your students are getting the best usage of time possible. This three step program will make sure that during the school year, the last

thing you will have to worry about is time.

The first step is observing and recognizing what classes you are going to teach the following school year. Look through and begin to gather resources, this is something that should be happening near the end of the first school year and turn into a background habit. There is a reason for this, because by the end of June you should have a huge list of resources that you can begin turning into lesson plans for your students. This will also help refresh your memory on things you may have forgotten in the past pertaining to your subject, because let us be honest: that definitely happens.

The next step is to start mapping out your plan of attack for the agenda. Create a plan for when you are going to work on it, when you are going to do more research, student samples, videos, etc. Now is the time to find out all that information. Begin going into your classroom and arranging the room, basically get a feel for just how you want the next school year to go and how you are going to implement all the great ideas you have for your students.

The last action is finish your agenda. You have all the information you need right in front of you, so now it is simply putting the puzzle pieces together into one coherent thought that will flow smoothly from lesson to lesson and work efficiently. Now obviously all of this is easier said than done, but it is important to remember teaching is a commitment and year after year these lesson plans are only going to become better and better.

Snow days

The term “snow days” refers to a day where class is missed because of the weather, but sometimes teachers do not realize that “snow days” happen all the time. Whether that be because of fire drills, assemblies, or whatever the case may be, throughout your teaching career you are going to come across times where class is missed and you need to put your agenda into double time.



This is where teaching shines and teachers are able to demonstrate their fluency in the education field. This is not an easy feat and many teachers struggle with it, but this is time management at its finest hour. When this happens start looking at your agenda and what you can and cannot cut out of it, what you can shorten, what needs to be lengthened. It is going to seem like there are a thousand things you need to do, but the

key is making your students think that nothing could be going better. Confidence, clarity, and organization is key in these situations. As for the teachers who prefer to teach on the fly, just be aware of what the essential information is that your students need to know.

Another issue with missing classes is what happens when you are teaching two sections of the same class and one class becomes ahead of the other. All of a sudden it becomes a question of whether there is a way to stall another class effectively, without being unfair to the other class. This has become one of the hardest dilemmas teachers have had to face and it never becomes any easier. Most teachers resort to showing them a video, or allowing group work to distract them. Sometimes these ideas are the answer, but most of the time the best thing to do in these situations and use this time to teach your students something else that is interesting and engaging to your subject area. Advance their knowledge rather than stall it.

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